

At Flagstaff Medical Center (FMC), we value the importance of our continuous process improvement efforts. We are continually seeking ways to make hospital processes more efficient and safer, for both our patients and staff. When the Office of Newborn Screening voiced concerns over the high number of prolonged transit times across the State, we knew that this was an opportunity to even further refine our processes.

Working together, the FMC's Women and Infants' Unit and Laboratory developed a plan to improve our transit times. One of our biggest obstacles in timely specimen delivery is our rural location; lab specimens are not routinely picked up for shipment on weekends. The Laboratory director worked with her team and arranged for a lab tech to personally deliver specimens to FedEx every Saturday. This has now become a routine process.

We also took steps to improve how our specimens are processed in-house. Specimens were routinely collected by nurses and placed in clear plastic baggies before being sent to the Lab. Once placed in our pneumatic tube system, they blended in with other specimens and often weren't seen as soon as they should have been. This resulted in delayed processing that often led to a delay in shipment. As a result, the Women and Infants' Unit changed to sending specimens to the Lab in white envelopes clearly marked "Newborn Screen" on the outside so that they would be easily noticeable. An added plus of this change is that the envelopes allow the specimens to "breathe," which also improves drying time.

Most importantly, we provided education to our staff. We shared the information that the Office of Newborn Screening shared with management and explained the importance of timely testing in the diagnosis and treatment of metabolic disorders. We emphasized the importance of proper specimen collection and handling. In the Lab, particularly, we focused on raising staff awareness for the need to process specimens in a timely manner.

It is too easy to become complacent and fall into unproductive routines. We have shown how important it is to always be looking for ways to improve. With a little education, teamwork and a desire to be excellent, positive changes happen. We are very proud of this success!

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